

VZCZCXRO6275
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDBU RUEHFK RUEHHM RUEHKSO RUEHLN RUEHNAG RUEHPB RUEHPOD
RUEHYG
DE RUEHVK #0023/01 0500618
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 190618Z FEB 09
FM AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1088
INFO RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHZU/ASIAN PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION COLLECTIVE
RUEHVK/AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK 1190

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VLADIVOSTOK 000023

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EFIS](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: SALMON POACHING BY THE TON IN RUSSIAN FAR EAST

VLADIVOSTO 00000023 001.2 OF 002

¶1. Summary. Salmon poaching remains a serious concern for environmentalists in the Russian Far East. Salmon stocks are in danger of complete depletion, and law enforcement agencies have been ineffectual at stopping over-fishing. The federal government has developed various programs designed to save salmon stocks and halt rampant poaching, but economic hard times have made illegal fishing more attractive to poachers, and corruption hinders enforcement.

Salmon Poaching Continues Unabated

¶2. According to the recent World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-Russia report on illegal, unregulated and unreported catch of salmon in the Russian Far East (RFE), the actual catch of chum salmon over the past three years was 1.5 times higher than officially reported. In 2006, the officially-declared volume of salmon was 273,000 tons. However, WWF calculations based on official import figures from neighboring countries show that those countries imported 426,000 tons of Russian salmon. The poaching of salmon on spawning grounds has increased considerably in the past decade across the Russian Far East, especially in Kamchatka, Magadan and Sakhalin. The annual volume of roe production, legal and illegal production combined, has increased to 26,000 tons. WWF specialists asserted that about half of this amount was procured by poachers and processed illegally.

¶3. According to Russian Fisheries Minister Andrey Krainiy, over 35 per cent of fish products purchased in local stores were caught by poachers. Major General Valentin Letunovskiy of the Russia Border Guard Directorate suspects that poachers earn more than 500 billion rubles (USD 15 billion) per year. The illegal salmon catch is almost the sole source of income for villagers in remote RFE areas, where up to 90% of families live through poaching. Poachers in Kamchatka, for example, harvest at least 54,000 tons of salmon annually, extracting only the roe, then and discarding the rest of the fish.

¶4. The official salmon fishing season ends in October, and winter is a popular time for transporting illegal catch. Authorities have found huge volumes of illegal caviar and salmon in hidden in caches ready for transport by automobile, snowmobile, or helicopter for further domestic or overseas delivery. For example, in late fall customs officials impounded over 500 kilograms of caviar en route to Magadan by helicopter. In Sakhalin, a vehicle with two tons of illegal caviar was detained in September, and in Kamchatka traffic police happened to stop a truck with ten tons of caviar aboard. Law enforcement agencies are reporting seizures of tons of illegal caviar and salmon products regularly, and numerous criminal cases have been filed against poachers.

¶5. Fish poaching generally consists of three activities: catching out of season and thereby harvesting fish during times when they would normally reproducing; catching without permits,

which leads to environmentally detrimental fishing practices; and catching with permits but over the authorized limit, which leads to over-fishing.

Most Salmon Shipped to Asian Markets

¶16. By far, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea import most of Russia's salmon products. Japan is the leading importer of salmon overall, and imports up to 25,000 tons of the more expensive and endangered sockeye species per year. Chinese imports of the less expensive Russian Pacific salmon have increased to 50,000 tons per year, and sockeye has reached over 900 tons per year. WWF has recorded a large discrepancy in official data on sockeye trade -- overall sockeye imports from Russia by these countries exceeded the total officially recognized Russian export by 27 percent. The difference in the figures indicates a high level of undeclared salmon being shipped to those destinations.

Enforcement Efforts Continue

¶17. Recent raids by law enforcement agencies, Rosselkhozadzor (Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Monitoring), and regional Fishery Supervision Agencies have shown some success. In early autumn, a Coast Guard patrol discovered a well-equipped poaching facility on Iturup Island in the Kurils which had boats, large refrigerators, fish processing machines, packing containers, and over 1,500 tons of caviar. In late summer 2008, a special anti-poaching team impounded over six tons of caviar and 129 tons of chum salmon in a raid along the Yama River, a spawning area in Magadan Oblast. In the same river last summer, authorities discovered 1,500 tons of decaying chum salmon, which had poached for their roe. Thousands of tons of decaying salmon carcasses left by poachers along roads and river banks of spawning rivers are discovered every year

VLADIVOSTO 00000023 002.2 OF 002

throughout the RFE hinterlands.

New Regulations Come Into Effect

¶18. According to an amendment to the federal law on fishing, beginning January 1, 2009 all fish harvested in the exclusive economic zone of the Russian Federation must be taken back to Russian ports before being exported or processed for domestic consumption. This would hinder poachers who often take their catch directly to Asian markets and presumably would allow Russian authorities the chance to conduct more thorough and systematic inspections. A further amendment to the regulation is expected that will mandate that all fish products delivered to Russian ports must be sold through a state-regulated Russian Fish Exchange.

¶19. WWF specialists suggest further expansion of regulation and enforcement efforts, including stricter control over transportation of roe, the use of aircraft to patrol spawning areas, and regular verification by regional inspectors of vessels accepting salmon. Some experts have suggested that the federal government should establish a monopoly over salmon roe trade.

Corruption Throughout the Industry

¶10. The fight against poachers is complicated not only by technical difficulties and lack of funding for enforcement, but also by wide-scale corruption. Authorities at relevant agencies sometimes turn a blind eye to poachers or warn poachers of upcoming raids or patrols in return for set fees or a cut of the profits. According to local experts, corrupt militia officers have a fixed price list for allowing smugglers to ship contraband -- from three rubles per kilogram of frozen salmon to 50 rubles per kilogram of caviar. Russian Fisheries Minister

Andrey Krainiy has acknowledged to the media that the fishing industry is among the most corrupt in Russia. He also said that "there are no poaching operations without official 'krysha', and all poachers receive some kind of protection from Rosselkhoznadzor, the Interior Ministry, the Border Guard Directorate, or other agencies."

Comment

¶11. Salmon poaching is a growing problem in the Russian Far East. Though the authorities have shown some desire to crack down, their efforts will not be effective unless the corruption at all management levels in all agencies related to the fishing industry is eradicated. Furthermore, the sheer number of federal and regional agencies involved in the efforts is unwieldy, and frequent restructuring of those agencies impairs their ability to work efficiently. The question is what will come first -- the eradication of corruption and poaching in the fishing industry, or the eradication of salmon stocks in the Russian Far East.

ARMBRUSTER